

The concepts of society and culture, so vital in the pursuit of understanding human behavior, its patterns and effects, are ultimately expressed in the lives of individuals. Cultural values are carried, symbolized, and integrated in the minds of human beings. Innovative individuals challenge and change culture. The crucial intersection of society, culture, and individual has not always been granted sufficiently high priority in social science research to exploit this rich vein. As sociology and anthropology have moved toward quantitative methods, material is often fractured so that society seems peopled by disembodied fragmented men and women. This is regrettable since the case study was previously an important research technique of both disciplines.

Literary genres have long been recognized as powerful reflections of society and culture operating to fulfill, encourage, thwart or destroy protagonists who symbolize the group. The humanistic insights represented in such works can add new dimensions to the concept of ethnicity.

In the analysis of three Chicano literary works (*Y No Se Lo Tragó La Tierra* does not seem to be a novel, technically) forming the basis of "God's Silence and The Shrill of Ethnicity in the Chicano Novel" we get a multidimensional view of the agonies and conflicts generated by America's stratified, heterogeneous society in the mental states and lives of Chicanos. It is doubtful that any strictly sociological study could convey the many facets of psychological trauma or earthy resilience that are expressed in these works.

What constitutes ethnicity is central in the analysis. The powerful bonds of language and religion are often assumed to be the most embracing sources of ethnic identity. Yet we find that for Chicanos in contemporary America religion may well deter the development of the new ethnic identity needed to transform the situation. In these works religion is perceived as one source of passivity which denies the creative identity needed to challenge exploitation and degradation.

The characters in these works give eloquent expression to problems of marginality, problems heightened for the Brown Buffalo by the fusion of Spanish and Indian heritages. His picaresque odyssey conveys the dilemma and possible avenues of solution more graphically than a statistical study could. He tries

assimilation, retreat through drugs, psychiatry, a sojourn south of the border, only to return intent on assisting Chicanos in Los Angeles. One fringe benefit of a paper such as this is motivation to read on. The sequel, *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*, must be read to follow the Brown Buffalo's quest for identity through social activism.

This essay is an excellent demonstration of how an interdisciplinary approach to the study of ethnicity can result in unique contributions. The empathy generated by literary works is combined with the concepts and analysis of social science to enhance depth of understanding. This kind of approach should encourage instructors of ethnic studies courses to include literary works in course bibliographies. While courses in sociology through literature are available in a few schools, they are rare and could richly enhance existing curricula. Techniques for research in literature, such as those explored by Rodriguez, should be increased and refined to provide an expanding field of investigation with promising possibilities.

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